MUSICAL COMMENT.

THE YOUNG ITALIANS—LEONCAVALLO—WHAT HE THINKS OF WAGNER—STORIES ABOUT VERDI—SOMETHING ABOUT MUSIC IN ENGLISH UNIVERSITIES.

Hand in hand with the exploitation of conductors during the last year in Europe there was an exploitation of the young composers of the Italian school—Mascagni, Leoncavallo and Puccini. Obviously the purpose in view in parading the composers, getting them to conduct the first performances of their works here, there and everywhere, was to make them a fad. It was not a healthy sign of the times, and with all the hullabaloo made in Vienna, Berlin and other places, the result, we fancy, was harm rather than benefit, to their reputations. Mascagni and Leoncavallo profited in pocket, doubtless, but it is more than likely that the reaction which seems to have set in will be like that which follows all overstimulation in nature. It is a significant fact in connection with the operas of Young Italy that they have so quickly destroyed the appetite which craved them so feverishly at the outset of the spasmodic movement, and they have effected no change in the popular taste. A great many composers looked upon the tumultuous one-acters of Mascagni and Leoncavallo as exemplifications of a trick which could easily be copied. Copy them they did, and with considerable success, too, and perhaps it was this circumstance as much as any other that gave the death-blow to the movement. Musical spasms are neither enjoyable nor endurable for a long space, and it did not require much thinking or much feeling to discover that the novelty in "Cavalleria Rusticana" and "I Pagliacci" was not in style or matter but only in dramatic subject. There was a sort of intoxication in the hot-blooded rapidity of movement, and when the fascination of this wore off the new things ceased to charm. The critical historians of the future will not fail to make correct and significant deductions from the fact that the young Italians never duplicated their first successes, notwithstanding that it was the opinion of those who passed judgment upon their works that they improved in the artistic quality of their compositions with practice. There could be no better proof of the superficiality of their work.

The attitude of Verdi toward the young Italian school of composers has invited speculation. Nothing is plainer than that the pupils of Ponchielli have borrowed more from the Nestor of Italian composers than from their master. This form of flattery, however, does not seem to have affected Verdi, and he has not vouchsafed his benediction to a single one of the young men. This does not necessarily argue antagonism, however, for Verdi has as great and invincible a repugnance to pronouncing on the merit of the compositions of other musicians as Brahms had. Before Mr Van der Stucken came to New-York he travelled about in Germany and gave a number of concerts of his own music, warmly encouraged by Liszt and Grieg. He also visited Verdi with his portfolio under his arm, and tried to get the grizzled maestro to speak a word of criticism. Verdi received him with great affability, cross-questioned him about music in Germany, but gave him never an opportunity to produce his precious manuscripts, among which, by the way, there was some music to Heine's "Ratcliff," which subject has served Mascagni for an opera. "If your music is good, you know it," said he gently but firmly, "and my opinion will not affect it one way or the other."

When Leoncavallo was in Vienna some weeks ago to negotiate for the production of his "Bohème" at the Court Opera, he was asked about Verdi's relations with the representatives of Young Italy. His answer was entertaining: "Oh, yes, Verdi sees us, but—a little weakness—he does not want to recognize us, though we are all wooing him for a word of praise. Not long ago Mascagni planted himself on the steps of the Hotel Milan, in Milan, with the resolve to introduce himself to the world famous man. He addressed him timidly: 'My name is Mascagni; my "Ratcliff" is to be given for the first time to-day. I should be happy, master, if you were to attend the performance.' And Verdi had only the ungracious reply: 'No, I can't do that, if I did somebody would ask me for my opinion to-morrow, and I should not know what to say.' Nevertheless, he attended the performance in the background of a box, as invisible as God behind the clouds. He has never deigned to speak a word to me—his publisher is Ricordi, mine Sonzogno. . . . For the opening of an exhibition in Milan I had composed a symphony for chorus and orchestra in three parts—a festal, sonorous thing. We were in the midst of a rehearsal with several hundred singers and instrumentalists when it was reported to me that Verdi had asked permission to attend. 'If Verdi wants to come in open all doors to him at once,' was my answer. We offered him a chair in the front row, but he declined it and stood behind a pillar. Standing does not weary him, once when his companions suggested a rest after a long and wearisome promenade the octogenarian said angrily: 'What is it you are forever after? It isn't so bad as that. Am I dead?' Do you want to bury me already?' Well, the rehearsal came to an end, and my musicians waited expectantly for the old man to come out from behind the pillar, in order to give him an ovation. He came down the aisle close to the orchestra, and one of my friends who is acquainted with him said: 'Attention! Now he'll say something pretty to you!' Indeed, Verdi beckoned my friend to approach; the latter hurried to him. In a tone of voice which was none too low Verdi asked: 'Which did you say is Leoncavallo?' 'He with the light overcoat next to the conductor?' 'Indeed!' said Verdi. He gazed at me penetratingly from head to foot and stalked out."

Leoncavallo also told this anecdote concerning Verdi and Victor Hugo. Verdi labored long before he persuaded the poet, who was vexed that the tragic beauties of his "Le Roi s'amuse" had been turned into operatic effects, to attend a performance of "Rigoletto." He succeeded at length, and Hugo sat in the box with the composer and listened to the opera. But not a word did he speak. Verdi's impatience got the better of him, and he asked: "Well, what say you—about the quartet, for instance?"

"Show me a way in which four persons can be permitted to speak simultaneously," replied the poet, "and I will write something more beautiful than your quartet."

Here is Leoncavallo's opinion of Richard Wagner: "Wagner is not a man; he's a revolution. It is impossible to write a phrase without thinking of him. And yet we must not overdo the matter. One manner will not do for everything. For instance, if I wanted to set a modern gentleman to music, one wheeling along the street on a bicycle, it would not do for me to take the classical music of the 'Ride of the Valkyrion' for the purpose."

RUGGIERO LEONCAVALLO.
(Italian opera composer.)

It is greatly to be hoped that the subject of music in the universities, which was discussed at the recent annual convention of the Music Teachers' National Association, will receive consideration at the hands of the presidents, professors and students of the universities themselves, and not be left to newspaper writers and musicians unconnected with our great educational institutions. Whether or not music can be introduced into the curriculum and made to be a vital factor in popular culture is a most important question. It cannot be hushed to death by the occupants of the musical chairs, even if they are disposed to remain content with the present state of affairs, which we do not believe to be the case. One aspect of the matter which has received no attention as yet is that presented by the cultivation of music in the universities. There are a great many practical minded persons who will question the value of professional teaching of pianoforte playing and the theory of music at the cost of a handsome endowment fund so long as the only evidence of the practical cultivation of music brought to the notice of the public lies in the singing of the glee clubs and the strumming of banjos, guitars and mandolins. Something a great deal better is done in some of the State universities of the West—Michigan and Minnesota, for instance—where choral unions are maintained, and high-class music in the larger forms is cultivated, but, of course, these institutions are favored by the fact that they have women students. It might be, however, that a way to something better than the present frivolity and indifference might be discovered by a study of the cultivation of music at the two representative English universities. The three most noted colleges of Cambridge are also distinguished by the excellence of their chapel choirs. They are King's, Trinity and St John's. King's College maintains its supremacy by offering choral scholarships to the boys' schools. It thus attracts good voices and musical talent. Successful candidates have free board and education, their own master and tutors and are fitted to enter the University. The Cambridge Musical Society, which was founded in 1843, has a mixed choir, obtained by admitting townspeople and the women students of Newnham and Girton as associate members. It gives two grand concerts each May term, one with orchestra and the other chiefly choral. Each college also maintains a society for the encouragement of music. Cambridge has had a professor of music ever since 1684. There is no special endowment for the chair, but the professor is assigned a stipend of £200 per annum. For this he must give not less than four public lectures, which are illustrated at the cost of the University, and must examine all candidates for musical degrees. For extra lectures he may charge fees.

At Oxford there are daily choral services of high excellence at Christ Church, Magdalen and New College. There are three public lectures and lecture courses on the history of music, acoustics and theory, and practical courses on the pianoforte, organ and violoncello. There is an Oxford Musical Club, which encourages concerts of chamber music, and a University Musical Union, whose members, all of them students, play chamber music. There can be no question that to the kind of cultivation given to music at the universities in Great Britain is due the credit for the fact that British musicians are the most widely cultured men of their profession in the world.

AMERICAN BANKS NEEDED IN CHILI.

From The Milwaukee Evening Wisconsin.

It is announced in London that the Chilian Government, dismayed by the collapse of the Bank of Santiago (the fourth important bank that has recently gone into liquidation in the republic), has resolved to accept the offer of an Anglo-Belgian syndicate to establish a joint stock bank under Government guarantee in Chili. The syndicate has undertaken to deposit gilt-edged securities to a large amount in the Bank of England as a warrant of good faith. It seems a pity that no United States financiers can see their way to establish some institution of this kind in Chili, since all that is required to make it a success is sound business methods, the absence of which alone has led to the failure of the four native banks above mentioned.

IRON IN CHINA AND JAPAN.

From The Philadelphia Record.

Both China and Japan are preparing at no distant day to free themselves from the "iron yoke" of the countries which have heretofore furnished their supplies. Japan is spending $2,500,000 in the erection of works designed to turn out railway and shipbuilding material, and China has erected large works at Hanchow to use a part of the immense iron resources of the country, which, when developed, with the aid of cheap labor and patient skill, may in a not far distant future play an important part in the markets of the world, and perhaps compete on British soil with British iron, for coal is now shipped to New-Castle, although not from China.

RISKING THEIR LIVES.

THE ABJECT TERROR OF GERMAN ACTORS AT THOUGHT OF AMERICA.

Heinrich Conried, who goes to Germany and Austria every summer to get actors and singers for the Irving Place Theatre, was talking the other day about those whom he had secured for the coming season. He was speaking in a calm and even a complacent way, when suddenly his brow darkened as if he had caught an actor who did not know his part at the last rehearsal. "You wouldn't believe," he said, "that any half-way intelligent people could be so ignorant as those German actors are about America. Why, they think that in America you have to go around with one hand on your pocketbook and the other on your watch. And as for getting here! 'Risking their lives,' they call it. They get three or four times as much pay as they do at home, but it is with the greatest difficulty that they can make up their minds to 'risk their lives.' Every one of them makes his last will and testament before he starts, and then they say goodby to everybody and make up their minds that this is the end of everything.

"I found a good musical director in Austria, leading the orchestra and composing music which became the property of the theatre on a salary of 150 marks a month. I said to him: 'How do you live on that? Your meals must cost you as much as three marks a day, don't they?'

"'Yes,' he said, 'they do.'

"'That makes 90 marks a month,' I said: 'that leaves you only 60 marks a month for your rent and clothes, and everything else. Now, suppose you come to America and get $25 a week. You can get a room and board for $10 a week, and that leaves you $15 a week, more than your whole salary here, for other purposes.'

"He scratched his head and thought. 'That is all very well for my food and clothes,' he said, 'but what am I to get for risking my life?' And he wouldn't come on those terms. They know nothing about living in the comfort that people of the same sort do here, but after you have told them all about that and have offered them three times the pay that they are getting, they think they ought to have a great deal more for risking their lives.

"When I told them that I had crossed the ocean seventy times, they said: 'Oh, that is all very well for you. After you have risked your life once, it doesn't matter to you, but it is different with us.'

"There was my new prima donna, Mme. Kopaczi. I had many talks with her and her husband before I could persuade her to sign a contract. Finally, I induced her, and I signed the contract myself and was waiting for her to sign, when all at once there was a terrible row in the next room, screaming and weeping and groaning. 'What is the matter?' I cried. 'Is there anything the matter with madame?'

"But it was only an hysterical fit, brought on by the thought that it was settled and she must come to America. 'Very well,' I said to her husband, 'don't have her sign; I don't want her to sign when she is in such a condition. Wait a while; talk it all over with her, and let her sign when she feels better about it.'

"In the end she did sign, and the next morning came a message from her husband: 'After a sleepless night and a long talk with my wife, we have decided that we cannot come to America. The risk is too terrible.'

"Then I replied that I had given them plenty of time to consider, and they had weighed the whole matter thoroughly before she signed the contract, and that now that she had done so I could not allow her to reconsider. I must hold her to her contract. Then they tried to make out that the contract was not legal, because it was made out on a common piece of writing paper, instead of the regular blank, and so on. But about that time Mme. Sorma, who was here with me last season, came to town, and she called on Mme. Kopaczi and told her all about America and the journey, and then she met some Americans and some more Germans who had been here and knew the Irving Place Theatre, and they all told her how lovely it was, and at last she decided to come, and signed a formal contract and felt better about it."

HOSPITAL LIFE IN MATABELELAND.

From The London Graphic.

An English Nursing Sister writes from Matabeleland: "Hospital life here is more exciting than in a London hospital. On night duty from the wards we can hear the lions roaring, while tiger-cats and jackals prowl round the verandas, making us feel thankful that most of our patients are mounted police and sure to return. The night orderlies, too, are good shots. One of our patients is suffering from an encounter with a lion. With sporting intent, he one night set a gun trap for a lion, but when it went off it only wounded instead of killing it. In the morning he followed in its track, came up with it, fired, but again only wounded the creature, which sprang ferociously at him. He tried another shot, but the gun missed fire and the lion was on him. Fortunately its forelegs were wounded, so it was not such a ferocious foe. It got its teeth into the left thigh of our patient, whose hands, in trying to beat it off, were badly bitten. Luckily, the lion suddenly lifted its head, and a friend with our patient saw his opportunity and shot the creature dead. He has poured strong ammonia, which sportsmen always carry in case of snake-bite, into the wounds, and telegraphed for the nearest doctor (thirty miles off), who brought him here in a pitiable condition, but he is doing splendidly. The lion's skull adorns one of the wards, but the skin was eaten by the jackals. The claws are to be mounted as brooches and distributed in memento to the patient's friends."